

Essay on
Reason & Instinct

by
— Thorndike

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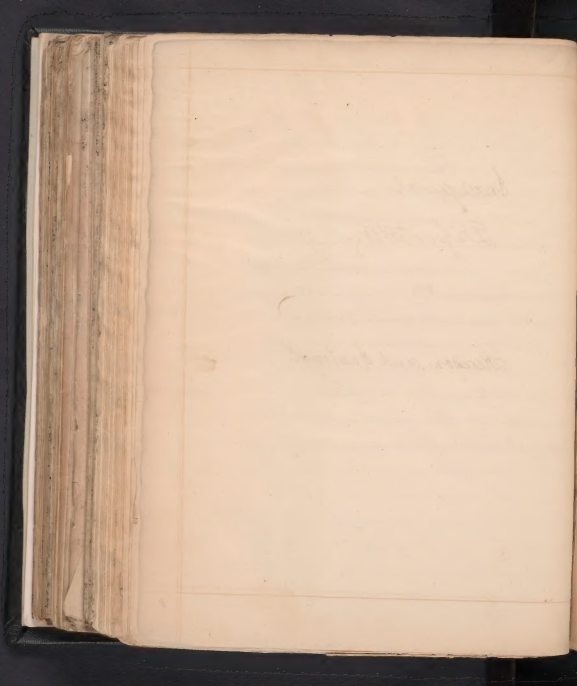
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Inaugural
Dissertation

on

Reason and Instinct



Genl." In an attempt to compose an inaugural dissertation, it might occur, that a desire to avoid the suspicion of arrogance or presumption, would demand an apology for its numerous imperfections. The duties which are exacted from a student during his attendance on a course of Lectures are so numerous & laborious as almost totally to preclude a possibility of complying, either with the established rules of rhetoric, with grammatical propriety, or that explicit elucidation, which the importance of the subject may demand, with the exigencies of other duties of perhaps more real importance. I shall therefore conclude these observations by quoting a remark of the justly celebrated Herder in which he says "We should first learn, then practice, & afterwards write." The subject of the following essay is that of reason & instinct, and among the many opinions which have been advanced on it at different periods, none have more generally prevailed than the one which considers reason as peculiar to man, and instinct as appertaining to the lower orders of animal creation. Although this opinion has so generally prevailed, & has even been supported by the learned & amiable Addison in the "Spectator

tor, that pleasing & delightful source of useful instructions to
all its perusers, yet I feel confident in believing that had
his acquaintance of natural philosophy, extended to ~~some~~
fact which subsequent discoveries have brought to light
his confidence in the doctrine which he then advocated ~~would~~
have been much shaken or destroyed. At the very com-
mencement of an inquiry, a difficulty presents itself of small
magnitude. It is all important that the individual whose
ideas we would wish to know, should convey to us by the
powers of language, his sensations, his desires, his inclina-
tions, his antipathies, his trains of thought &c. from impressions
from without. In the human species when there are not in-
fluenced by language, the countenance, the mirror of the mind
reflects at times, with unerring certainty the operations which
are going on within; while in the inferior animals, though
the countenance is to a certain extent, expressive of their feel-
ings, yet we acquire but little information from it; for
it relates to language, it is well known, we receive none
from that source. Our knowledge then of the motives
which actuate the brute creation &c. to certain actions,

must necessarily be derived from an attending observation
of their actions; & when we find them to correspond with
those we are accustomed to perform ourselves, under the in-
fluence of the dictates of reason, we are abundantly sanc-
tioned by the decisions of philosophical fairness, in attribu-
ting them to the same source. It may be here necessary to de-
fine terms, & the definition of reason given by Charles For-
ster in his essay on natural history, is the one which will
be adopted; viz: the faculty of distinguishing between good &
evil, of calculating future consequences, & of discerning
the fitness of things. By instinct is meant that innate prin-
ciple which spontaneously & intuitively directs the living, propelling
it, to the performance of certain actions, independently of any
distinction, calculation or discernment, except so far as it relates
to the impulse of that principle; as the duck & the water snake be-
haviour themselves to the water as soon as they are liberated from
the duck, & the young of several mammalia immediately af-
fixing themselves to the teats of their mothers, after birth. These
are all illustrative of the principle we denominated instinct.
A question arises, can the actions we above ascribed, to perform

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representing not dictatorial ^{oppression} but ^{contaminated} ^{1st} ^{2nd} ^{3rd} ^{4th} ^{5th} ^{6th} ^{7th} ^{8th} ^{9th} ^{10th} ^{11th} ^{12th} ^{13th} ^{14th} ^{15th} ^{16th} ^{17th} ^{18th} ^{19th} ^{20th} ^{21st} ^{22nd} ^{23rd} ^{24th} ^{25th} ^{26th} ^{27th} ^{28th} ^{29th} ^{30th} ^{31st} ^{32nd} ^{33rd} ^{34th} ^{35th} ^{36th} ^{37th} ^{38th} ^{39th} ^{40th} ^{41st} ^{42nd} ^{43rd} ^{44th} ^{45th} ^{46th} ^{47th} ^{48th} ^{49th} ^{50th} ^{51st} ^{52nd} ^{53rd} ^{54th} ^{55th} ^{56th} ^{57th} ^{58th} ^{59th} ^{60th} ^{61st} ^{62nd} ^{63rd} ^{64th} ^{65th} ^{66th} ^{67th} ^{68th} ^{69th} ^{70th} ^{71st} ^{72nd} ^{73rd} ^{74th} ^{75th} ^{76th} ^{77th} ^{78th} ^{79th} ^{80th} ^{81st} ^{82nd} ^{83rd} ^{84th} ^{85th} ^{86th} ^{87th} ^{88th} ^{89th} ^{90th} ^{91st} ^{92nd} ^{93rd} ^{94th} ^{95th} ^{96th} ^{97th} ^{98th} ^{99th} ^{100th} ^{101st} ^{102nd} ^{103rd} ^{104th} ^{105th} ^{106th} ^{107th} ^{108th} ^{109th} ^{110th} ^{111th} ^{112th} ^{113th} ^{114th} ^{115th} ^{116th} 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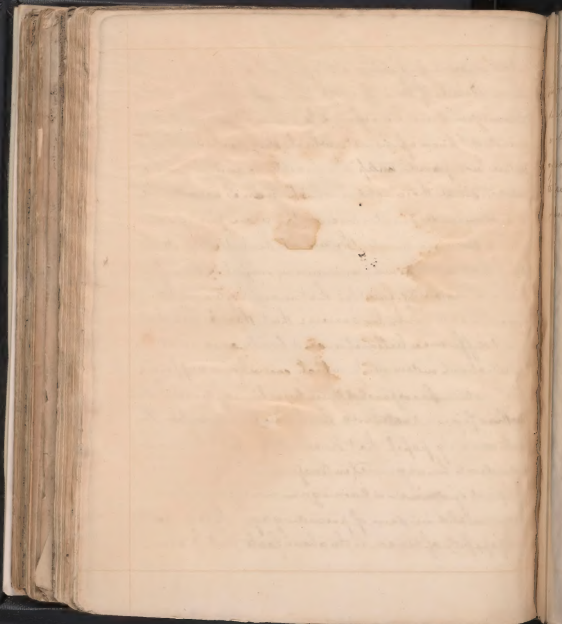
in the present case, the evidence is not sufficient to
show that the witness is a credible person, and
therefore, the court is not bound to accept his testimony.
It may be stated in ^{passing} apparent anecdote that the witness
has a bad character, and is not to be relied upon.
It is true that the witness is a man of bad character,
and that he has been convicted of a crime, but it is not
necessarily true that he is a man of bad character,
and that he is not to be relied upon. It is true that
he has been convicted of a crime, but it is not necessarily
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bad character, and that he is not to be relied upon.





city I conceive be inadequate to the explanation of the facts
above related. If their instinct will not account for their
this origin must be referred to some other affections of
minds, & I know of none to which they could with any
justice be referred, unless to a faculty or endowment of
reason, since those actions which man is accustomed
to perform under similar circumstances are precisely sim-
ilar to theirs in kind. It cannot then but incline to the
belief that brutes as well as man are subject to the influ-
ence of a reasoning faculty; that man is often impelled
by instinct & brutes by reason; that there is not that
great difference between man & brutes, as it relates to
intellectual endowments, which some have supposed.

That nature has separated them by a line of demarcation
in their figure, & other e. there can be no doubt. The
brute can only possess that knowledge which he as an
individual has acquired (in Majoritative), while man
by the aid of science & learning, can avail himself of the
accumulated wisdom of preceding ages. If then brutes
are possessed of reason, as the above facts tend to show,



if they possess an intellectual power, & intellect be the por-
tion which separating from the clods of mortality by
death is to exist in the endless ages of eternity, will they
not also be immortal? The answer to this important ques-
tion, is that the only true assurance we have of an eternal exis-
tence hereafter is derived from revelation; & we have no
revelation that has promised immortality to brutes.

Finis



